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Protracted conflicts in the GUAM area and their implications for international peace, security and development

Letter dated 23 October 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Georgia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit the statement of Gela Bezhuashvili, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, dated 21 October 2006 (see annex).

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 27.

(*Signed*) Irakli **Alasania**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 23 October 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Georgia to the United Nations addresssed to the Secretary-General

Statement of Gela Bezhuashvili, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia

Good evening ladies and gentlemen - and thank you for coming at such a late hour.

Although it is very late I feel it is necessary to gather all of you together tonight because of the statements made some minutes ago by the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin at the Lahti Summit.

Let me be very clear, I am very alarmed by the deliberate and gross misrepresentation of the facts by the Russian President. And quite frankly, I would never have expected that the President of such a great country would respond in such a clearly inaccurate manner - and would directly insult the intelligence of his European colleagues.

Tonight I want to talk about facts and I want to talk about principles.

Specifically, President Putin deliberately misrepresented facts about the nature of the current tensions between Russia and Georgia - and specifically about the nature of the territorial conflicts in Georgia. The issues we are here to address are democracy and values - both of which are flourishing in Georgia. And both of which are under grave threat in Russia today.

This is not simply a question of Russian-Georgian relations as the President of the Russian Federation would have it. This is about a clash of values. And Mr. Putin is using Georgia as a pretext to evade this simple fact. It is a clash between European values and practices and those that are practiced in Russia today. In doing so he has chosen to misrepresent the facts - and I am here to correct them for you.

Deliberate Inaccuracy Number One: Never in history has there been a genocide against the people of South Ossetia. The leadership of Russia would appear to be reassembling facts and history to suit their own versions and interests. This is deeply troubling.

Deliberate Inaccuracy Number Two: In the case of Abkhazia, ethnic cleansing was conducted there. And it was conducted against 500,000 people with troops that were armed and supported and sponsored by the Russian Federation - and this included more than 280,000 ethnic Georgians. None of these people are allowed back to their homes due to the presence of Russian troops who do not allow them to return. Rather, many of these people found refuge in Russia and it is these very people who are now being ethnically targeted, forcibly put on airplanes and sent out of their homes. I find it very profoundly disturbing that the Russian President had no words of sympathy for these people - for which many people in Russia-proper have branded as a new pogrom - and who now find themselves uprooted for a second time.

Deliberate Inaccuracy Number Three: The Government of Georgia and the people of

Georgia have no intention to use force against its citizens – as repeatedly stated. This is a pure fiction, and the Russian President knows this but chooses to presume that the international community is ignorant. Thankfully you all know better. There is a Peace Plan that has been created by my government and approved by the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and many other governments around the world. This is the basis for our vision and the central foundation for this is the territorial integrity of Georgia. This is the universally endorsed fact.

In spite of the Russian President's deliberate misrepresentation of the facts, we draw your attention to:

1. 15 years after the demise of the Soviet Union, we are still dealing with the legacy of propaganda and disinformation.

2. The deterioration that has been mentioned by President Putin did not begin when we expelled Russian saboteurs a few weeks ago. It began when we started down the path of developing a sound and predictable democracy.

3. At the same time we once again welcome the Russian President's expression of interest in re-establishing a dialogue between Russia and Georgia.

On the subject of fact and disinformation – for many months Russia has imposed unilateral and punitive sanctions against Georgia. It has launched a campaign of disinformation and ethnic targeting. All of us can only ask what the real purpose of this policy is. We wonder whether Russia's purpose is simply to use these conflicts for other reasons – to use Georgia as a pawn in a larger game. We are not a pawn. And this is not a Georgian problem.

The issue is the policy of the state of the Russian Federation – and that policy has global consequences. And this is a matter of vital importance for the European Union. And we are sure that all our friends in the European Union understand this. All of our friends who have developed and thrived, due to value-based societies.

Once again, let me reiterate our readiness to engage in a dialogue with the Russian Federation – in a constructive, genuine, well-intentioned and positive manner.

But let us not forget that the irresponsible and cynical promotion of separatism by greater regional powers has led to blood baths and disasters. We do not need this. Europe does not need this. The world does not need this.

Thank you very much.